

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress

1st Session

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Page S-14114 Temp. Record

Vote No. 459

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION CONFERENCE REPORT/Passage

SUBJECT: Conference Report to accompany the Military Construction Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1996 . . .
H.R. 1817. Agreeing to the conference report.

ACTION: CONFERENCE REPORT AGREED TO, 86-14

SYNOPSIS: The conference report to accompany H.R. 1817, the Military Construction Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1996, will appropriate \$11.18 billion for military construction, family housing, and base realignment and closure for the Department of Defense. This amount is \$480 million more than requested, and \$2.4 billion over the amount appropriated for FY 1995. Details include the following:

- military construction: \$2.814 billion, including \$430 for the National Guard and Reserves (the Administration requested only \$182 million; last year's appropriation was \$574 million; for related debate, see vote No. 322);
- military family housing: \$4.304 billion (not including funding for two new programs, the Family Housing Improvement Fund (\$22 million) and the Homeowners Assistance Fund (\$75.6 million)); and
- Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC): \$3.898 billion.

Those favoring passage contended:

We are pleased to present this frugal, balanced conference report to the Senate. It is within its 602(b) allocation for both budget authority and outlays. Thus, the conferees have done their part to keep Congress on its glide-path to a balanced budget. Approximately one-third of the amount provided will be to fund the base closure and realignment account. More than one-third, 38 percent, will go to meet critically underfunded family housing needs. For barracks and dormitories, \$675 million will be provided. A large percentage of current quarters for military members and their families is antiquated housing that was designed as temporary shelter during World War II. Anywhere else in America one could go to jail for keeping people in such dilapidated housing. A third element of this bill is that it will earmark \$430 million for projects for the Guards and Reserves. These earmarks are necessary

(See other side)

YEAS (86)				NAYS (14)		NOT VOTING (0)	
Republican (49 or 91%)		Democrats (37 or 80%)		Republicans (5 or 9%)	Democrats (9 or 20%)	Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Abraham	Helms	Akaka	Hollings	Brown	Baucus		
Ashcroft	Hutchison	Biden	Inouye	Faircloth	Bingaman		
Bennett	Inhofe	Boxer	Johnston	Kyl	Bradley		
Bond	Jeffords	Breaux	Kennedy	McCain	Feingold		
Burns	Kassebaum	Bryan	Lautenberg	Roth	Kerrey		
Campbell	Kempthorne	Bumpers	Leahy		Kerry		
Chafee	Lott	Byrd	Levin		Kohl		
Coats	Lugar	Conrad	Lieberman		Moseley-Braun		
Cochran	Mack	Daschle	Mikulski		Wellstone		
Cohen	McConnell	Dodd	Moynihan				
Coverdell	Murkowski	Dorgan	Murray				
Craig	Nickles	Exon	Nunn				
D'Amato	Packwood	Feinstein	Pell				
DeWine	Pressler	Ford	Pryor				
Dole	Santorum	Glenn	Reid				
Domenici	Shelby	Graham	Robb				
Frist	Simpson	Harkin	Rockefeller				
Gorton	Smith	Heflin	Sarbanes				
Gramm	Snowe		Simon				
Grams	Specter						
Grassley	Stevens						
Gregg	Thomas						
Hatch	Thompson						
Hatfield	Thurmond						
	Warner						

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

because the Administration and the Pentagon refused to ask for any funding. Traditionally, the decisions in this area have been left up to Congress. By not asking for funding, the President was able to make his budget request look more frugal than Congress'. Without these additions, this conference report's funding level would be nearly the same as the requested amount. In this era of downsizing, our country is becoming increasingly reliant on guard and reserve forces. Those forces are now regularly deployed. We share our colleagues' concern that the process of equipping the guards and reserves has led to pork-barrel abuses, and we thank them for their acknowledgment that progress is being made in reducing those abuses. The solution, though, is not to refuse to provide funding, nor is it to give the Defense Department a pot of money to spend as it sees fit because that solution would only result in the President dictating how to spend the money. The solution, instead, is to continue improving on the reforms of the process that have already been made to make certain that only meritorious projects receive earmarks. We do not believe this conference report is perfect, but we do think it is highly responsible and will meet our military construction needs for fiscal year 1996. We therefore are pleased to vote for its adoption.

Those opposing passage contended:

Argument 1:

The Senate-passed bill was bad; this conference report is even worse. It spends way too much money on defense construction projects at a time when deep cuts are being made in numerous critical social welfare projects. The President was not stingy in his budget request for military construction projects; he asked for nearly \$2 billion, or 22 percent, more than was appropriated in fiscal year 1995. The conference report before us would add \$479 million to that request. In other words, a 20-percent increase is not enough for Congress; it wants a 28-percent increase. A lot of the extra spending is for special earmarked projects. Members may be able to go home and brag that they were able to win funding for their districts, but doing so does not serve the national interest. We urge Senators to put the national interest ahead of their own parochial interests by joining us in voting against this conference report.

Argument 2:

The military construction appropriations bill has historically contained numerous unrequested earmarks for projects that almost always are found in the home States of Members who sit on the defense subcommittees. This conference report makes significant progress in stopping this wasteful practice, but there is still a long way to go. This year, only projects that met certain criteria to prove their merit were to be eligible for earmarks. Of the 110 earmarked projects that are in the conference report, all but 22 meet those criteria. Of those 22 projects that have no discernible relation to national security requirements, 21 were added by the House, and one was added by the Senate for a project in West Virginia. The Senate at least is clearly becoming more responsible.

Though some progress has been made in ensuring that earmarked projects have at least some value, the fact remains that the key factor in deciding which projects to fund seems to be location. Of the 37 States that have representation on the defense subcommittees, 34 will receive funding for projects. Fully 75 percent of all the add-on funding will go to these 34 States. The appearance, and we believe the reality, is that these earmarks are for pork barrel spending.

Our military is being cut at an alarming rate. All of our military commanders have long lists of funding needs, and those lists do not contain requests for the add-ons in this bill. As General Mundy put it, he would rather have the wife of a marine officer living in a substandard house than to have to appear before that wife and tell her husband died in combat because he was inadequately armed. Every commander would welcome funding to improve housing or to meet any of the other priorities in this bill, but not when more urgent funding needs were not being met.

Our objection to this bill is not to spending money on defense. Our objection is to how this bill will spend money on defense. It will waste very scarce and very needed resources. Though it is not as blatant and extreme in its wasteful spending as past military construction bills have been, defense funds have never been as scarce before as they are now. We cannot vote for a bill that allows any amount of waste, and must therefore vote against this conference report.